

*The CASE of the Company of Free Fishermen of the
River of Thames (whose Bounds by their Charter are
Limited from Staines-Bridge in Middlesex, West-
wards, to Harwich in Essex, Eastwards)*

Several Acts of Parliament observe, That the Safety of this Kingdom, and Support of Navigation, depend upon the Improvement and Encouragement of the Fishery.

For Preservation whereof, within the said River, the said Company are Anciently Incorporated, and have several By-laws, approved by the Court of Lord Mayor and Aldermen of *London*, and duly Allowed and Confirmed, for the Regulation and Government of the Fishermen of the said River.

Notwithstanding which, many Persons, not Regarding the said Laws, frequently catch Fish out of Season, and when Spawning, and by unlawful Nets and Engines Destroy, and Expose to Sale, great quantities of unfizeable Fish, and make great Destruction of the young Brood and Fry of Fish in the said River, whereby the Fishery in the same is extremely Decayed and Decreased; and the said Offenders are of late become so Numerous and Disorderly that the Court of Assistants of the said Company are not sufficiently enabled to Regulate the same, and that in the Endeavours to Reform the same the Lives of many of them have been of late much Endangered; so that the said Corporation, for want of better Means for the Regulation and Government of the said Fishermen, and for the more Effectual Discovery of Offenders, and more easie and speedy Recovery of the Pains and Penalties inflicted on such Offenders, hath not had the desired Effect.

Which Decay of the said Fishery, does not only prevent the City of *London* and other adjacent Parts from being plentifully supply'd with Fish, and occasions the Excessive Price thereof, to the Inconvenience of the Inhabitants of the said City and the Neighbouring Places thereto, but also Discourages divers from being put Apprentices to the said Fishery, to the great Prejudice of Her Majesty in the Sea Service.

The Fishing Trade is also a good Nursery to Breed up and Preserve great Numbers of Seamen for Her Majesty's Navy; But Fishermen in time of Pressing conceal themselves in private Places, and cannot be so conveniently Impressed by Her Majesty's Officers as by the Court of Assistants of the said Company, were they Impowered (as the Watermen of the said City are) to send away from time to time such Numbers of able Men as the Admiralty shall require: For want whereof, many Ancient Fishermen, who have great Families and Charges, have been hurry'd away, when the Young and Seafaring-Men are conceal'd; and thereby Her Majesty has been deprived of the Service of many Hundreds of able Seamen.

Wherefore the said Court of Assistants, who have been serviceable to the Government, by their actually Raising at once 500 Able Men out of such Fishery for the Sea Service, and who are still ready on all Occasions to Serve Her Majesty, Humbly hope, that they may be aided by a Bill for the better Preservation and Encouragement of the said Fishery, or otherwise Relieved as this Honourable House in Their Great Wisdom shall think fit (with a Saving as to the City of *London's* Right of Conservacy of the said River, the High Court of Admiralty, the Vice-Admiralties of *Kent* and *Essex*, Cities, Towns Corporate, Lords of Manors, Proprietors, &c.)